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Common items for each session: multi-stakeholder dialogue

Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Discussion paper contributed by the forest workers and trade unions major group**

Summary

Deforestation and other forms of unsustainable forest management are problems with social root causes. Policies developed to promote sustainable forest management will fail to achieve their objectives if they do not recognize the root causes and attempt to address them.

A first step forward would be to integrate the International Labour Organization (ILO) core labour standards into all sustainable forest management national forest programmes and forest certification instruments. Additionally, increasing ILO involvement in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests provides added value. Finally, a logical response to the social causes plaguing forestry involves actions that seek to re-establish the employment relationship where it is broken and establish it where it has not existed. Such actions would seek to increase the value and value-added activity of forestry within the economy in such a way as to increase the amount of wealth creation that remains in forest-dependent communities for forest-dependent workers and their families.

* E/CN.18/2003/1.
** Prepared by the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers.

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I. Introduction

1. The forest workers and trade unions major group has been increasingly active in promoting sustainable forest management and reducing deforestation. The International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW), representing forestry, wood and construction workers, and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF), representing agricultural and plantation workers, have been in the forefront of the union movement to promote sustainable forestry and plantation work based on attacking the primary causes of deforestation, desertification, and non-sustainable forest and plantation management.

II. Background

2. The causes of the deterioration of forest cover and forest health around the world are social. One of the primary causes of deforestation is poverty. For the poor, forests offer a cornucopia of resources necessary for survival. Deforestation results from:

- The conversion of land from forest uses to agriculture. In many tropical areas, the agricultural land is abandoned after three to four years resulting in abandoned forests.
- Non-commercial harvesting, where most of the wood is used for subsistence activities, such as cooking, shelter and heat.
- Urbanization, where land is permanently removed from forest uses and converted to urban uses.
- Commercial exploitation not based on sustainable forest management programmes. Wealth from commercial forestry activity tends to accrue to the better-off segments of society.

3. Deforestation is most concentrated in the developing countries and tropical forests, where poverty is most concentrated. Most international attention has been focused on protecting tropical forests.

4. Against this backdrop, numerous countries have tried implementing harvesting bans to protect their forests. In many instances, those countries that have attempted to protect their forests by creating legislation to ban activity have failed to stop deforestation, since the conversion from forestland to agricultural land continues unabated. Where harvest bans aim to curtail economic forest exploitation, the forestry activity simply continues, but it occurs as illegal logging. Many of these logging bans have been driven by pressure from international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund. Examples exist where developing countries were pressured to enforce logging bans in order to obtain refinancing of loans, only to be pressured to support export-based harvesting a few years later. Neither banning harvest nor promoting log exports addresses the social component of unsustainable forest management and both approaches can and do cause considerable disruption to fragile forest economies.

5. Harvesting bans are extremely crude public policy devices and frequently give workers the option of obeying the law and facing critical survival issues or continuing their survival strategy and risking the penalties of legal non-compliance.

6. Likewise a strong environmental NGO movement and many industry associations have focused a great deal of their attention on the concept of sustainable forest certification. These voluntary certification schemes have far more areas of certified forest in developed countries than in developing countries and, despite efforts to the contrary, the amount of developed country area covered by such schemes is growing at a rate much faster than the tropical areas, which were the initial targeted areas. While a valuable tool to promote the use of sustainably managed wood products, they have yet to deliver an economic premium to any in the forest products chain of production.

7. The role that certification schemes play in promoting demand for sustainably managed wood products is an important one, since increased global demand will promote higher prices for landowners and, at least in theory, provide a potential for higher wages for all workers in the forest production value chain. Unfortunately, the lack of power of most forestry workers is a substantial deterrent to any trickle-down benefit actually reaching those workers most in need.

8. In addition, the advent of numerous schemes has created competition within the commercial user community, creating confusion and diverting resources from the social dimension of deforestation. Instead, resources have been allocated to fight for market share of forest acreage certified by some certification schemes.

9. The failure of the various certification schemes to develop mutually agreed-upon criteria for sustainable forest management has led many governmental agencies to adopt environmental policies such as logging bans and adverse taxation policies, which unintentionally aggravate the social causes of deforestation, especially in developing countries. Few Governments have been directly involved in certification schemes, although, recently, more Governments are recognizing the need to promote sound economic values in their national forest programmes in order to support the market forces necessary to make forestry an attractive option.

10. Even in rural areas of developed countries, poverty and deteriorating economic standards of living are sources of non-sustainable forestry activity. Here, as well as in the developing countries, informal and disguised forest work contributes to deforestation and improper forest management techniques. Without a formal employment relationship or the regulations and training requirements accompanying such a relationship, even the best-designed forest management plan faces non-compliance. National sustainable forest management plans may fail because those on the ground doing the harvesting are unaware or economically unable or unwilling to follow the forest plan. This is especially acute where pay systems for commercial forestry are based on piece-rates.

11. One response by Governments is to attempt to allocate more resources to law enforcement activity. That does not take into account the fact that forest workers must choose between eating and obeying the law. As market liberalization reforms impose unrealistic and destructive competitive pressures on employers in both developed and developing countries, more jobs are marginalized and the informal sector engaged in forestry activity grows. This results in less control of forest practices on the ground by private sector multinational corporations and

Governments, regardless of policy statements or sustainable forest management plans. The rapid rise of contract labour in the forest sector has transferred millions of dollars of potential revenues from Governments (in the form of lost tax revenue), from forest-dependent communities and from the forestry workforce to corporate stockholders and international financial institutions. Informalization of the forestry workforce also promotes unsustainable management practices at all levels of forest management.

12. Neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes undermine social protections by fostering market pressures that weaken the employment relationship in the forestry sector. This happens primarily through the contracting out of work previously done by employees. This has the effect of denying these workers (former employees, now independent contractors) the protections of ILO core labour standards, even in countries that have adopted the standards. Involuntarily, self-employed persons have few options to seek enforcement of ILO core labour standards or the power to bargain for better conditions of work. The involuntarily self-employed in forestry also suffer from higher occupational injury rates and are rarely covered by retirement programmes, raising the likelihood of future social burdens on already overstressed government resources.

13. Unfortunately, structural readjustment programmes frequently create economic situations that force even Governments to contribute to the poverty of rural forest-dependent communities. When Governments seek to cut costs by adopting procurement policies that promote the deterioration of the employment relationship and when they engage directly in contracting work out, they contribute to the shift of capital from forest-dependent areas to global institutions. This frequently happens when national forestry services are contracted out to private vendors. In developed countries (Germany and the United States of America, for example) and most developing countries this results in a decline in the knowledge, skills and abilities of the forestry workforce. Incidentally, this also causes a substantial decline in socially beneficial forest research.

14. Until social standards are incorporated into all certification schemes and social and economic protection extended to all citizens, rather than just to a minority of employees in the formal economy, the objectives of the United Nations Forum on Forests, as well as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, will not be attained in this sector.

15. Extending social protections, such as ILO core conventions, social security schemes, and occupational health and safety legislation to forest workers currently not covered is an important method for ensuring that a greater proportion of the wealth created by forest activities remains in the rural forest-dependent communities. It is also necessary to increase the economic value of forest resources (commercial and non-commercial). Governments can assist in this process by developing procurement policies that provide incentives for the use of wood products from certified forests. Tools, such as carbon sequestration, aimed at developing markets for forest values and products that do not now exist could also be a source of wealth for forest communities. It seems that the sophistication required for such devices may mean that these may also yield benefits that fail to trickle down to the forest workforce.

III. Implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action by global union federations

16. The unions' approach to the issues included in the third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (economic aspects of forests, forest health and productivity and maintaining forest cover) is based on attacking the social root causes of deforestation and unsustainable forest management. It is difficult, therefore, to describe union programmes within the three categories listed on the multi-year programme of work for the United Nations Forum on Forests. Instead, reported below are the trade union programme elements that most closely approximate the IPF/IFF proposals. Following each item is a parenthetical listing as to which category the item fits best within the framework of the United Nations Forum on Forests. The programme elements are:

(a) Working with the private sector to adopt global framework agreements that require sustainable development and sustainable forest management through private sector action and voluntary sustainable forestry certification schemes targeted to developing countries. This work has focused on the development of social standards as a required component of sustainable forest management. This includes extending ILO core labour standards to all workers in the forest products value chain of multinational corporations with global framework agreements with global union federations. (Economic aspects, Maintaining forest cover);

(b) Assisting countries in the promotion of policies to secure land tenure for local communities aimed at fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of forests through local union capacity-building and through direct action with local tribes and communities to create community and joint tribal/union forestry ventures. (Economic aspects, Forest productivity, and Maintaining forest cover);

(c) Assisting global union federations affiliated labour unions to develop policies and capacity to promote sustainable forest management in ecosystems affected by desertification and drought. This is being accomplished by working with unions in areas affected by desertification in Asia and through the development of community forestry projects in Kenya, Burkina Faso, and Ghana. (Economic aspects, Maintaining forest cover);

(d) Education of union members globally as to the criteria of sustainable forest management and facilitating their active participation in the design of national forest programmes. This also enables national unions to participate in the development of criteria for the various labelling schemes. Furthermore, it enables trade unions to promote national legislation designed to assist communities and forest-dependent peoples to retain a larger percentage of the wealth created by forests. This includes opposing trade and restructuring policies that promote poverty in rural areas and that act to reduce financial resources available to forest-dependent communities. (Economic aspects, Forest health and productivity);

(e) Through the Global Forestry Programme the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers acts annually to transfer approximately 65 per cent of its funding to developing countries. This occurs through capacity development and the operation of forestry programmes in Africa, Asia, and South America (see below).

IV. Progress on implementation

17. Global union federations have contributed in the following ways to promoting the IPF/IFF proposals for action:

(a) Codifying the ILO core conventions in various certification schemes: Pan European Forest Certification, Forest Stewardship Council, Malaysian Timber Certification Council (Convention 87, codified in 2002), and Indonesian Ekolabel (pending);

(b) Developing union knowledge of sustainable forestry criteria by conducting training for workers in: Brazil, Chile, Peru, Argentina, People's Republic of China, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Poland, EU countries, Malaysia, and Indonesia;

(c) Modelling community forestry pilot projects in: Ghana, Kenya, and Burkina Faso.

V. Means of implementation

18. The five primary means of implementation are:

(a) Through capacity development of trade unions that deal directly with forestry issues on a daily basis. Capacity-building includes education and training in the principles of sustainable forestry management, certification criteria, and the techniques to enforce the ILO core labour standards, as well as technical support of foresters, economists and occupational safety and health experts;

(b) Working actively with the larger certification schemes, the trade unions have played an important role in getting the core ILO conventions accepted as a prerequisite for forest certification;

(c) Through global framework agreements the global union federations work with numerous multinational corporations to insure that they and their suppliers use fibre from sustainably managed forests and extend ILO core conventions to all suppliers and their workers;

(d) Working with national Governments to develop codes of conduct, primarily in terms of occupational safety and health in forestry and wood processing;

(e) Creating opportunities for social dialogue between multinational corporations, national Governments, and national trade unions and promoting the development of consensual policies based on economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable forestry practices.

VI. Monitoring

19. Monitoring the various strategies requires extensive resources. In most cases the global union federations rely on local union affiliates to report abuses of the social or environmental criteria of their national legislation, global framework agreements, and/or sustainable forest certification scheme criteria. Once reported the global union federations respond in a series of ways:

(a) First, meet with local affiliates and national or global partners to clarify the nature of the violation or problem;

(b) Secondly, if a formal conflict resolution methodology exists, use the methodology to resolve the conflict;

(c) Thirdly, if no conflict resolution methodology exists, then global solidarity campaigns are launched to create political, social, and economic pressure to obtain compliance.

20. During 2002, the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers engaged in activities leading to the suspension of a sustainable forestry certificate of a multinational corporation operating in Asia for violation of the ILO core labour standards. The Federation has conducted two solidarity campaigns to enforce global framework agreements in the construction industry. The Federation is also scheduled to conduct a tour with the IKEA company in early 2003 to ensure that ILO core labour standards are being adhered to by third-party suppliers in Asia and to monitor the use of sustainably managed wood through the entire manufacturing process.

VII. Conclusions

21. The best developed and well-intentioned plans for achieving sustainable forestry and combating deforestation frequently fail for social reasons. The increase in illegal logging is but one example of what occurs when national forestry management policy is developed in the absence of clear social protection criteria. The principal cause of deforestation continues to be poverty. Until the wealth of the forest is shared in an equitable manner with forest dwellers and forest-dependent workers, deforestation will continue to occur, especially in areas of relative economic hardship. The poor, regardless of their location in developed or developing countries, will act in a manner to survive. Such actions frequently are made illegal by well-intentioned forest protection legislation. In addition, the drive by major economic players in forestry to cut costs is resulting in an increased reliance on contract and informal work. This work tends to contribute to non-sustainable forestry activity, since it is more difficult to regulate, is associated with fewer or no traditional social protections and results in more, rather than less, economic hardships for these workers.

22. Finally, the competition between sustainable forest certification systems continues to divert resources, energy and attention from the social causes of non-sustainable forestry.

23. The ILO core labour standards represent the foundation for decent work and the empowerment of the forestry workforce and thus a path to decrease poverty and promote sustainable forestry. However, the increasing trend towards informal work in forestry creates an increasing number of workers who are denied access to the ILO core labour standards, even in countries where the standards have been adopted.

VIII. Requested actions by the third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

24. The forest workers and trade unions major group:

(a) Calls on all partners participating in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) to require recognition of the ILO core labour standards in all forestry projects, research, grants, and loans;

(b) Calls on the partners participating in the Partnership to focus work plans, research and pilot projects to identify methods of redistributing forest wealth generating activities to forest-dependent communities and the forest workforce (formal and informal);

(c) Requests that the Forum at its third session invite the ILO to become actively involved in the Partnership and promote and monitor the core labour standards through its International Labour Standards programmes and its Sectoral Activities programmes;

(d) Invites all participating countries to develop work plans to extend existing national social and economic legislative protections for formal workers to all informal workers operating in forestry activities. This could include:

(i) Amending relevant laws, conventions, and agreements to promote a presumption of employment, thereby placing the burden of proof as to a worker's employment status on the employer and not on the worker;

(ii) Identifying national policies and programmes that support the informalization of the forestry workforce;

(iii) Working with all social partners to find adequate resources for proper monitoring and labour inspection for the forestry workforce;

(iv) Working with all social partners to develop standardized certification requirements for forestry workers and deliver the training required in order to obtain the skills needed to be certified;

(e) Invites participating countries to review national sustainable forestry standards, codes, and practices so as to ensure that the ILO core labour standards are codified in such instruments and enforced by the ministries that have responsibility for forest management;

(f) Invites participating Governments to adopt policies and resolutions to promote mutual recognition of all certification systems that require sustainable forest management and include ILO core labour standards.